8: Ascher E-5 (1960) 1962 NU31 Seri NU31

225 In fishing for turtle, one man stands at the bow of the boat, holding the mainshaft and extension cord in one hand. When he sights a turtle, he propels the mainshaft at the animal's carapace, retaining a firm grip on the mainshaft and the extension cord. If it is struck, the turtle lurches away, loosening the foreshaft and unplugging it from the mainshaft. Tired eventually by the tension [411] applied by the fisherman on the extension cord, the turtle is finally stunned by a wooden club and lifted into the boat.

225 There is evidence that the turtle-fishing complex has consider-175 able time depth and stability. The Seri were using similar apparatus and methods at least as early as 1825 (Hardy 1829: 296-297). At [501] this time they employed balsa boats rather than wooden boats with outboard motors and torches of cactus fibers instead of kerosene lamps. The complex continued, apparently with little change, through 1896 (McGee 1898: 187-193). Wooden boats and kerosene [177] lamps began to be adopted during the 1920s, and outboard motors were introduced in the 1940s.

411 During the entire period of 135 years (1825-1960), however, the 225 harpoon tackle underwent only one important innovation. The 176 gasket on the foreshaft was introduced by a Seri Indian about the year 1935. The addition of the gasket was related to, and coincided [439] in time with, the first attempts of the Seri to supply turtles to the commercial market. When they caught turtles solely for their own use, they did not need to keep the animals alive for very long, but when they began to sell them it became important to preserve them alive until they reached the market. The gasket acts like the hilt on a sword, preventing the entrance of the foreshaft hafting into the turtle's body. Through its contact with the carapace, it restricts the rotation of the point within the animal's body and provides a seal which inhibits the loss of blood, and thus prevents early death. After the turtle is stunned with a club and lifted into the boat, the foreshaft is removed and the hole which it made is stuffed with a piece of cloth.

124 Seri men were shown a harpoon foreshaft from a museum archive 411 and asked what it was for and whether they themselves made similar ones. If an informant acknowledged that he made them, he was asked, at the minimum, to detail the materials he used, the procedures he followed, and the approximate amount of time it would take him to produce one. Later he was requested to show the field worker examples of the foreshafts he had made. Of the approximately 40 adult Seri males, about 25 were available for questioning. Of these, approximately ten did not make foreshafts or had made them in the past but did so no longer; they were mainly older men and those [474] engaged in the administration of the Sociedad Cooperative de Pro-[887] duccion Pesquera Seri. Five men either would not or could not volunteer information. Data were obtained from the remaining ten adult men and from one eight-year-old boy; they include 21 foreshafts made by these eleven people.

411 The materials from which a foreshaft can be shaped and as-325 sembled vary within what is available in the Seri environment. Iron